HOMILY FOR THE 32\textsuperscript{ND} SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME –C

There is an important message in today’s gospel, though it comes in rather strange wrappings. This is the only time we encounter the Sadducees in Luke’s gospel. The Sadducees were Jews who mostly came from the wealthy aristocracy. They didn’t believe in the resurrection, partly because they didn’t find enough evidence for it in the scriptures, and partly because they were so worldly in their orientation. It seems they had a hard time looking beyond the good things that were theirs in this life to the possibility that there was something more than what this life could provide.

And they tried to discredit Jesus, because he posed a threat to their exalted position in Jewish society. So, knowing that he had proclaimed his belief in the resurrection, they presented him with a hypothetical situation that was intended to show how silly the idea of resurrection was. The situation was this: a woman had been married to seven different husbands. So whose wife would she be in the resurrection? To the Sadducees, this seemed like an unsolvable problem. And because they couldn’t conceive of any possible solution, they concluded that there must not be a resurrection.

In response Jesus made it clear that this was their problem, not God’s. If they really knew God, they would know that God is quite capable of transforming human life in such a way that the problem pointed out by the Sadducees was really no problem at all. The fatal flaw in their argument was that they had limited God to what they could understand and imagine. Their God was too small!

I think this gospel is really important because it is easy for us to fall into this same kind of thinking when it comes to God. We look at the world around us, we see all the pain and suffering, or we look at the difficulties in our own lives which seem insurmountable, and we think that God has abandoned us or is powerless to help us. Because we can’t imagine how God could possibly transform what is happening in our lives into something good, we assume that God can’t either.

But when we do this, we fall into the same trap the Sadducees did in today’s gospel. In judging God’s capabilities by our own limitations we lose touch with the living and true God, with the God who is capable of doing infinitely more than we can ever understand or imagine. As a result, our God becomes small, helpless – really no God at all. And so we deprive ourselves of the peace and hope that should be ours.

Thankfully, God doesn’t allow our little faith to keep him from doing great things – things beyond what we can imagine. I know many of you have experienced this in your own lives. I certainly have. When I decided to leave the Methodist ministry and become a Roman Catholic many years ago now, I didn’t know where I would be going or what I would be doing to support my family. But because I was so certain that I was following God’s leading I believed that God would provide. And God did. A position opened up for me to teach religion at a Catholic High School here in Columbus. And I thought that was it, everything was settled.

But that was not it. I realized after only a few weeks that teaching religion in a Catholic High School wasn’t going to work for me. I had no experience teaching in such a setting, and had no classroom management skills. So my classes looked like the out of control classrooms that we see in comedies sometimes. After a couple months I was so nervous going into a classroom that my whole insides were shaking. I had to quit after one semester. So I was jobless and receiving harassing phone calls from former students to boot. For the next few months I tried to find work with no success. I had a wife, three children, a mortgage for the first time, had become seriously depressed and I began to wonder if God really was working in my life after all.

Then, quite unexpectedly, without me doing anything to help bring it about, I was told by a friend about a part-time teaching position that had just opened up at the Josephinum. I’m sure he put in a good word for me and I was hired. After a few months, this turned into a full-time position. Then, this same friend invited me to take on a part-time position for the diocese in the Office of Liturgy. And it was there that I worked with a priest who encouraged me to consider becoming a priest. He connected me to other priests, who then approached the bishop on my behalf. The bishop agreed to sponsor my petition to the Holy Father. It was granted and I was ordained a priest. (Well, it took longer than it sounds, but it
happened!) There is no way I can explain how all this happened except that God was working mysteriously to bring me to a place in life more wonderful than anything I could have imagined. But I know that even this is not the end of the line for me. There is something more and infinitely better out ahead for me. There is something more and infinitely better out ahead for all of us. And if we have stopped believing this, then like the Sadducees in today’s gospel, our God has become too small.

The constant witness of the scriptures is that nothing in this life, whether tragic or good, is the end of the line for us. God is greater than anything this life can throw at us or bestow on us. There is nothing that happens in this life that God cannot use to bring about some greater good. He made this clear to us when he raised Jesus from the dead, renewing his life and transforming his tortured and broken body into something absolutely glorious. The resurrection reveals to us that God’s intention for us is always more life, not less. So with God, there is always something better ahead.

The mother and her sons in our reading from Second Maccabees certainly believed this, didn’t they? That’s why they were able to stand fast and remain hopeful in the midst of terrible tortures that were intended to break their spirits. Tortured to the point of death, we heard a young man say to his torturers, “You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever.” He knew that there was nothing his enemies could do to him, no matter how horrendous, that God could not transform into something good and glorious. He knew that our God is a God of the living, not the dead.

At this time, when there is so much fear over the outcome of Tuesday’s elections, when there is so much fear over what the future holds in store for us, it is so important for us to remember this. Whatever happens as a result of this election, or whatever else might happen during the course of our lives, it will not be the end of the line for us. The God who raised Jesus from the dead will be working through it all, and will be working in ways that will bring us into the glorious life for which he has created us. Now, more than ever, it is a time to live by faith not fear. There is no mess we can create that God cannot use to bring about something great. Embracing this truth and living it will go a long way towards pulling the people of our nation out of the darkness that seems to have enveloped us, so we can look to the future with hope.

Fr. Rod Damico
November 6, 2016